

THE OCCURRENCE OF *ANTIGASTRA CATALAUNALIS*
DUPONCHEL (LEPIDOPTERA: PYRALIDAE) IN
1985, AND AN ACCOUNT OF ITS PREVIOUS HISTORY

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The 1985 Occurrence

At the meeting of the Amateur Entomologists' Society on the 12th October 1985, Mr. J. T. Radford showed me a small unidentified pyrale, which I immediately recognised as this extremely rare migrant species. He had taken it on the morning of the 3rd October 1985 from the m.v. light trap situated in his garden at Walberton near Arundel, West Sussex, and was particularly struck at the time by its remarkable activity. The specimen, a male, has an alar expanse of 17mm, is in excellent condition and had evidently arrived sometime during the night of the 2nd/3rd.

Mr. Radford tells me the moth appeared in the middle of a good migrant period at Walberton, especially for the common species, notably *Autographa gamma* L. and *Phlogophora meticulosa* L., with the much rarer *Rhodometra sacraria* L. and *Heliothis armigera* Hb. there on the 1st and 3rd respectively. It may be that Mr. Radford's *catalaunalis* also formed part of an immigration of *Mythimna loreyi* Dup. and *Euchromius ocella* Haw., both of which appeared on or about the same date in unprecedented numbers over a wide range in southern England, along with *Spodoptera exigua* Hb.

Previous History

Antigastra catalaunalis appears generally to have been so badly recorded in the past, that of a possible 19 specimens that have occurred prior to 1985, only ten it seems have adequate data. Although extremely slender and somewhat inconspicuous for a pyrale, the moth is not hard to recognise and has been figured repeatedly in the literature, cf. Knaggs (1868), Leech (1886), South (1890) and Barrett (1904).

The first British *catalaunalis* occurred at Cheshunt, Hertfordshire in 1867. It was captured by W. C. Boyd, who writes: "I took it in our garden at Cheshunt, September 18th, flying over a flower bed in the dusk of the evening. I should probably not have paid much attention to it, taking it to be only *P. forficalis*, which was extremely plentiful that evening, if I had not been struck by its peculiar flight, hovering backwards and forwards more like the common house-fly than anything else I know" (Stainton, 1867). This specimen was ultimately acquired by F. G. Whittle, and is now in the BMNH.

Leech (*op. cit.* 45) records the species from "near Dover", but
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I have been unable to trace the source of this, though his "Near London" presumably refers to the Cheshunt occurrence. Meyrick's (1895, 1928) "Kent, a rare immigrant only" may be based on Leech.

Bankes (1906) in a graphic account of the capture of a *catalaunalis* at Mousehole near Penzance, Cornwall, on the 6th September 1906 says "I disturbed and netted at 4.35 p.m. from a mass of growing weeds beside the footpath (consisting chiefly of *Atriplex*, *Chenopodium*, and *Polygonum aviculare*) a small yellow moth which as it flew suggested a small worn *S. ferrugalis*. Imagine my astonishment when on glancing at it in the bottom of the net I instantly recognised it as *A. catalaunalis* — one of the greatest rarities in the whole British List. After a long tussel during which it danced about incessantly in my net forcing itself into every fold, and making a determined dive whenever it thought there was a crevice through which it could possibly escape (I have never had a more active and troublesome moth to deal with!), it was duly boxed". He goes on to say that on that same day he disturbed and took 10 male and two female *S. exigua*, and that since the 27th August a total of 101 *exigua* were taken. Bankes' *catalaunalis* is in the BMNH.

Dannreuther (1951) records two *catalaunalis* that occurred in 1950. Thus, on August 23, "a fresh specimen taken at Down Hatherley, Glos. (T. B. Fletcher)"; and, on October 6, a "fresh specimen taken at Bickenhall, Som. (A. H. Turner)". Turner (1955: 114) specifies "Strawberry Tree, Bickenhall". The Gloucestershire specimen was recorded in greater detail (cf. Fletcher, 1950).

In 1956, two were taken at Mawgan, Helston, Cornwall, on 10th and 11th September; and in 1958, one was taken at Freshwater, Isle of Wight, on 14th September. All three occurred in a m.v. trap and were exhibited (Knill-Jones, 1960). Also in 1958, but at Dover, Kent, one taken 5th September and another 14th September (Youden, 1959). Jewess (1977) records a female taken by Mrs. V. Taylor at m.v. at Newington, Kent on 28th September 1976.

One very old specimen without data, but formerly in the H. Burney and A. B. Farn collections is recorded as being in the A. F. Griffith collection in the National Museum of Wales, Cardiff (Anon., 1925:23).

Finally, there are in the British Museum (Nat. Hist.), six *catalaunalis* without locality or date. These consist of one labelled "Purdey coll/Bright"; and, five in the L. T. Ford collection, labelled in L. T. Ford's hand: "Catalaunalis/ex coll. Harris".

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make extracts therefrom, and Mr. Michael Shaffer (Department of Entomology, British Museum (Nat. Hist.)) for permission to examine the *Antigastra catalaunalis* in the Museum. I also acknowledge Mr. Radford's kindness in allowing me to record the details of his *catalaunalis*.

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ACRONICTA ALNI L. (LEP.: NOCTUIDAE) IN KENT — *A. alni* is a scarce moth in Kent, so it is worth recording that I had 8 males at my light trap between 13th and 24th June 1986, including 3 on the 19th. DENNIS O'KEEFE, 50 Hazelmere Road, Petts Wood, Orpington, Kent.